

# **SOUTH MOUNTAINS STATE PARK PARK PROFILE**

## **PARK PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) provided the first public works programs in the South Mountains in the 1930s by cleaning streams and building the upper and lower CCC roads to improve fire protection. Subsequently, timber companies and other landowners formed the South Mountain Association to coordinate a fire-protection program with State Forestry. National Park Service (NPS) studies recommended the area as a state park, first in 1940 and again in 1961, but the recommendations were rejected. Local support increased in the early 1970s for a state park to protect High Shoals Falls, and in 1974 South Mountains State Park was established with land acquisition funding approved by the General Assembly.

Significant biological resources include examples of diverse and well developed mountain and piedmont forest communities, six rare plants, one rare bird and a Dedicated Nature Preserve. The Cove Hardwood Forests support a wide variety of hardwoods more characteristic of the Blue Ridge Mountains than the park's Piedmont location. Steeper slopes above the Cove Hardwood Forests support Pine-Oak Heath communities. The park's highest peaks and ridges support pine communities. Bear oak, a rare shrubby species, occurs in the pine forests' understory. The Bear Oak Registered Natural Heritage Area protects a small population of this plant, while the High Shoals Falls Registered Natural Heritage Area supports excellent examples of Spray Cliff and Montane Acidic Cliff communities. The High Shoals Falls Natural Area also provides habitat for a number of rare plants as well as nesting habitat for the park's ravens.

Significant geological features include waterfalls, caves and overhangs. High Shoals Falls, which plunges 70 feet down a bare rock face, is on the Jacob Fork River. Two other waterfalls are found in the park, one on Shining Creek and the other on Little River. Small caves and overhangs are located in areas where rock slabs have been exposed through erosion or have broken off and rest against the hillside. A nearly complete, protected watershed lies within the park, formed by the ridge line of the South Mountains range. Jacob's Fork has high quality water and has been designated as an Outstanding Resource Water. Protection of this watershed was one of the main reasons for the park's establishment.

South Mountains State Park is an attractive mountain park in close proximity to the state's Piedmont population centers. Significant recreational resources include extensive opportunities for backcountry experiences, trout fishing and natural heritage interpretation. The park offers a trails system and backcountry conditions maintained to provide the opportunity to experience settings predominated by the forces of nature. Interpretation and education of the park's natural heritage are the highest priority visitor service.

Significant scenic resources include waterfalls, views of the Blue Ridge escarpment and the undeveloped expanses of the Jacob Fork watershed. High Shoals Waterfall is the most popular visitor attraction. The trails system provides access to striking scenery, including exposed rock faces, mountain streams and abundant wildlife.

South Mountains exists as a state park so that its valuable geological, biological, scenic and recreational values can be protected. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these values and providing park experiences that promote pride in and understanding of North Carolina's natural heritage.

## PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEME

**Jacob's Fork Watershed Ecology:** The study of the Jacob Fork watershed ecology focuses on two areas: the transition from Piedmont to Mountain in terrain and biotas, and the high quality of the watershed and the sensitive plants and animals that live in and around the river.

## STATISTICS

Visitation (1998)	174,814
Operating Budget (FY 98-99)	\$ 461,143
Revenue (FY 98-99)	\$ 20,188

## VISITOR FACILITIES

17 Trails (44.6 mile total)	Primitive camping (25 sites)
7 Hiking trails, 6 hiking and bridle, 4 hiking, bridle & mountain bike (total miles: hiking (44.6), bridle (32.3), mountain bike (14.4))	Primitive group camping (4 sites)
	Picnic areas (2) and shelter
	River fishing

## CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION NEEDS

1	The <b>realign/repave road, bridges and driveway</b> project will construct 3 bridges, relocate a 2700 ft. road, repave 10,500 ft. of old road, place compacted fill at bridge #1 and place 125 ft. of rip rap to protect stream.	\$ 1,437,316
2	The <b>visitor center</b> project will construct a standard 7000 sq. ft. visitor center, paved parking for 45 vehicles, exhibits, office furniture, audio-visual equipment and demolish an old house.	2,197,368
3	The <b>tent and trailer campground</b> project (land dependent) consists of 1 mi. of access road, 2 camping loops of 40 sites each, 2 washhouses, electric lines, well and well house, water lines, septic field and gate.	1,830,552
4	The <b>trail improvements</b> project will construct 6 bridges on the trails of the Henry Fork River, grade 12 miles of trail, construct a trail head parking area and harden 5 stream fords.	566,656
5	The <b>maintenance area</b> project will construct a 6-bay vehicle storage building with 1 enclosed bay and a hydraulic lift, a flammable storage building, lumber storage building, maintenance/shop building, warehouse, provide utility line extensions, a fuel tank, telephone service, an access road, paved maintenance yard, site preparation and landscaping.	939,318
6	The <b>ranger residences</b> project (land dependent) will construct 2 residences in the Morganton Watershed/Henry Fork River section of the park.	407,811
7	The <b>picnic area expansion</b> project will construct a new picnic area at the old primitive campground, build a 10-table picnic shelter with fireplaces, toilet building, parking lot access road, 40 individual tables with grills and utilities.	391,084
8	The <b>seasonal barracks</b> project will construct barracks to house 8 to 10 staff.	657,829

9	The <b>Henry Fork access development</b> project (land dependent) will construct 1/2 mile of new access road, picnic area, toilet building, utilities, well, septic field and parking for cars and horse trailers.	1,087,500
10	The <b>electric power</b> project will place 15,000 ft. of power line underground.	<u>294,179</u>
<b>TOTAL:</b>		<b>\$ 9,809,614</b>

### **DEDICATED NATURE PRESERVE**

**South Mountains Dedicated Nature Preserve:** In April 1998, 11,043 acres of South Mountains State Park were approved by the Governor and Council of State for designation as a Dedicated Nature Preserve. This designation supercedes areas previously dedicated as Registered Natural Heritage Area and provides more stringent rules for use and protection.

The preserve includes a large unbroken forest with its population of diverse wildlife and numerous rare and unusual plants. It protects a large part of the contiguous and wildest portion of the South Mountains including the Jacob Fork and Henry Fork watersheds. Included are extensive examples of natural communities typical of the Mountain region and nearly absent in the Piedmont: Chestnut Oak Forest; Montane Oak-Hickory Forest; and Acidic Cove Forest. Two populations of the Federally Endangered small whorled pogonia (Isotria medeoloides) and one of the best of only seven NC populations of bear oak (Quercus ilicifolia) occur here.

### **FUTURE LAND ACQUISITION NEEDS**

Completion of the South Mountains State Park master plan calls for the acquisition of 2,189 acres. Land acquisition objectives are to completely protect the water quality of the Jacob Fork watershed, provide land for park facilities and buffers and protect the water quality and natural communities of the Morganton watershed.

Master Plan Total Acreage	16,258 acres
Current Park Acreage	<u>14,069 acres</u>
<b>Acquisition Needs</b>	<b>2,189 acres</b>

### 1999 STAFF POSITIONS

Permanent		Seasonal		Peak Load	
Park Superintendent II	1	Park Attendant	2	Park Attendant	2
Park Ranger III	1	General Utility Worker	4	Office Assistant II	1
Park Ranger II	2				
Park Ranger I	2				
Maintenance Mechanic IV	1				
Maintenance Mechanic II	1				
Office Assistant III	1				

### PROPOSED STAFF ADDITIONS

Permanent	Seasonal	Peak Load